



open wide our hearts

the enduring call to love *a pastoral letter against racism*

Grade 4 Activity: Beatitudes Show Us True Happiness

Doctrinal elements:

Man's Vocation: Life in the Spirit

Dignity of the Human Person

- Every human desires happiness; the Beatitudes show us the path to the happiness of heaven. (CCC 1716, 1724-25)
- We are responsible for our deliberate actions. (CCC 1734, 1736, 1745)

The Ten Commandments--The Fifth Commandment:

- "Deliberate hatred is contrary to charity." (CCC 2303)

"Racism still profoundly affects our culture, and it has no place in the Christian heart. This evil causes great harm to its victims, and it corrupts the souls of those who harbor racist or prejudicial thoughts. . . . People are still being harmed, so action is still needed."

– U.S. bishops, Open Wide Our Hearts

Objectives

Students should be able to:

1. Recognize that the Beatitudes show us how to treat one another based on our dignity as human persons.
2. Recognize the systematic way colonialism dehumanized Native Americans and failed to recognize their human dignity.
3. Utilize the Beatitudes to see how Jesus wants us to treat others, and how witnesses of faith lived out the Beatitudes.
4. Start to understand the concept of social sin as it relates to injustice in the world.

Quotes from *Open Wide our Hearts*

- “But racism still profoundly affects our culture, and it has no place in the Christian heart. This evil causes great harm to its victims, and it corrupts the souls of those who harbor racist or prejudicial thoughts. . . . This calls for more than just words.”
- “Moving our nation to a full realization of the promise of liberty, equality, and justice *for all* is even more challenging. However, in Christ we can find the strength and the grace necessary to make that journey.”
- “Racism occurs because a person ignores the fundamental truth that, because all humans share a common origin, they are all brothers and sisters, all equally made in the image of God.”

Background Information for the Educator

Consider reading the Pontifical Biblical Commission’s [reflection on the Beatitudes in *The Bible and Morality: Biblical Roots of Christian Conduct* \(no. 47\)](#) for a refresher on how we are called to live the Beatitudes every day in both social and spiritual ways.

A summary is available in this packet.

- In *The Bible and Morality: Biblical Roots of Christian Conduct*, the Pontifical Biblical Commission (PBC) writes: “From the very beginning the beatitudes place morality in a radical context. They affirm paradoxically the fundamental dignity of the human being in the person of the most disadvantaged, whom God defends in a preferential manner: the poor, the afflicted, the meek, the hungry, the persecuted” (no. 101). The PBC explains the Beatitudes in these ways (no. 47):
 - The “poor in spirit” are those who “live in a precarious situation and, above all, acknowledge that they themselves have nothing, are wholly dependent on God.”
 - Those who mourn or are afflicted “compassionately participate in the necessities and sufferings of others.”
 - The “meek” are they who “do not use violence but respect their neighbors just as they are.”
 - Those who “hunger and thirst for righteousness desire intensely to act according to God’s will in expectation of the kingdom.”
 - The “merciful” are those who “offer active help to the needy,” as in Mt. 25:31-46 and “are ready to grant pardon” (Mt. 18:33).
 - “Peacemakers” are those who “do everything in their power to maintain and re-establish love-inspired fellowship among human beings.”
 - “Those persecuted for righteousness’ sake” are faithful to God’s will “despite difficult consequences.”

Familiarize yourself with the following holy witnesses:

- [Fr. Augustus Tolten, a candidate for sainthood](#)
- [Julia Greely](#)
- [César Chávez](#)
- [St. Junipero Serra](#)

If you choose to have the students work in groups, print out or have access to each of the stories linked above.

Instructions for the Lesson

Read together from Matthew 5:3-12 about the Beatitudes:

Blessed are the poor in spirit,
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed are they who mourn,
for they will be comforted.

Blessed are the meek,
for they will inherit the land.

Blessed are they who hunger and thirst for righteousness,
for they will be satisfied.

Blessed are the merciful,
for they will be shown mercy.

Blessed are the clean of heart,
for they will see God.

Blessed are the peacemakers,
for they will be called children of God.

Blessed are they who are persecuted for the sake of righteousness,
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed are you when they insult you and persecute you and utter every kind of evil
against you [falsely] because of me.

Rejoice and be glad, for your reward will be great in heaven.

Let's talk about the Beatitudes. Have you ever heard of the Beatitudes?

- List all the Beatitudes on the whiteboard or a large sheet of paper and talk with the students about each one and what it might mean.
- Assign small groups to read the stories of the saints listed above (one saint/holy person per group)
 - Ask the groups to identify which of the Beatitudes their person lived out. The person might exemplify more than one.
 - Ask students to report back about their saint (tell a little of their story, if necessary, and why they think the person exemplified any particular Beatitudes.)
- What do you think the Beatitudes tell us?
- Why is it important to live like the Beatitudes?

In our country, we haven't always lived according to the Beatitudes. In fact, sometimes we have lived in a way that does not honor the dignity of other people. This still happens today. We haven't always been meek, or peacemakers, or poor in spirit, and actions before and after our country's founding led some people to disregard the humanity of people who had been in North America much longer than the European colonists. Here's a short story of how that has happened in our history. This content is adapted from [this handout on Racism and the Native American Experience](#).

When Europeans arrived on the shores of this country, they were often blind to the dignity of indigenous peoples. Colonial and later U.S. policies toward Native American communities were often violent and led to the theft of their Native American land. Native Americans were often treated very poorly, even killed. Entire communities of Native Americans died because many people failed to recognize their humanity.

Those Native Americans that survived the colonial period were forced to give up their land. You might have heard of the "Long Walk" of the Navajo or the "Trail of Tears" where Native Americans were forced to walk from the Southeast part of the country to the West.

Many people died because they were forced out of their homes. Native Americans were also forced to give up their culture, including their native languages. All of this happened because many of the people who came to this country did not practice humility or understand that they had something to learn from those who were different from them. Those who trampled on the rights of Native Americans were more interested in gaining wealth and land than in being peacemakers across cultures. So, many people suffered.

The effects of this sin remain visible in the great difficulties experienced by Native American communities today. Poverty, people not being able to find jobs, poor health care, poor schools, the misuse and overuse of natural resources on Native American land, and disagreements over land ownership in Native American communities are all present today.

The Catholic bishops in the United States tell us, “All Catholics are called to give renewed attention to historical and present injustices resulting from racism against Native Americans; better integrate the needs and contributions of Native Catholics; and work for greater justice for the descendants of the first Americans.”

If time allows, talk more about a Native American saint, such as St. Kateri Tekakwitha or St. Junipero Serra.

Discussion:

- How did the colonists not honor the human dignity of the Native Americans?
- Why is it important to honor the dignity of everyone we meet?

Our baptism cleanses us from our original sin and makes us part of God’s family forever. Because we all belong to God’s family, we have a responsibility to treat others as Jesus instructed us in the Beatitudes.

- What was sinful about the way Native Americans were treated?
- Can you see how we still might be suffering from those sins today?

At Home or Closing Activity

- How do you live out the Beatitudes?
- Write down an example of how you can better follow three of the Beatitudes with your family or classmates.



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